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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS AND DRL/AWH

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TAGS: [PHUM VM](#)
SUBJECT: EUROPEAN DIPLOMATS VISIT PHAM HONG SON

REF: HANOI 2704

Classified By: Ambassador Michael W. Marine per 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary and Comment: European diplomatic representatives in Hanoi were able to visit Pham Hong Son in his home on November 23. However, the meeting -- in which Son described his democratic beliefs, explained his unwillingness to join forces with newly formed activist groups in Vietnam and observed that these new groups suffer from suspicions about being compromised by undercover agents -- ended early due to police interference. Son described himself as healthy, and his wife reported no repercussions following the meeting. The ease with which our European colleagues met Son is likely thanks to the completion of APEC; security officials permitted no visitors while world leaders were visiting Hanoi during Leaders' Week (November 12-19). We will again attempt to see Son while continuing to press the GVN on our remaining prisoners of concern. End Summary and Comment.

12. (C) French Embassy Political First Secretary Alexis Andres reported to us that he and colleagues from the British, German and Italian Embassies, together with a representative from the EC Delegation Office, visited former prisoner of concern Pham Hong Son in his home on November 23. Although there was a visible plainclothes police presence near Son's home, the diplomats were freely able to approach and enter the house. (Note: This contrasts with our own attempt to visit Son November 18, when police prevented Poloff from entering Son's home. End Note.) The diplomats met with Son and his wife Vu Thuy Ha for approximately 25 minutes before a policeman incessantly rang the doorbell and informed the group that the meeting had "gone on long enough." Although Son was unfazed and "seemed like he could talk all day," the diplomats took their cue from Son's visibly uncomfortable wife and left soon thereafter.

13. (C) Based on our French colleague's readout, the contents of the meeting seemed to track broadly with the Ambassador's and DRL A/S Barry Lowenkron's meeting with Son in October (reftel). Son told his European visitors that "now is not the time" to try to form new political parties or change Vietnam's political system. "It would be a waste of time and energy, and that's why I'm going to keep my distance from the new activist groups," he explained. Furthermore, the new dissident groups that have come on the scene in recent months -- the Vietnam Progressive Party, the 8406 Bloc and others -- need to do more to coordinate their efforts, but suspicions about "undercover police agents" within each other's ranks are preventing this, Son said.

14. (C) Son reported that his health is fine, and that he no longer suffers from a hernia nor coughs up blood, our French colleague relayed to us. Following the meeting with Son, his wife told the French Embassy that the police did not contact

them nor harass them in any way.

15. (C) Comment: The ease with which our European colleagues were able to visit Son is hopefully a sign that, now that APEC is over, Vietnam's security services are no longer at Defcon One. We will assess this on our own in the near future by once again attempting to visit Son in his home. In the meantime, we will continue to press the GVN on our remaining prisoners of concern: Nguyen Vu Binh and Phan Van Ban. End Comment.

MARINE